

Reports from a group or committee or the church as a whole draw out implications from minutes of meetings; identify significant leaders; show how money was used and tell of crises, successes, needs, problems and perceptions. They separate the significant moments and decisions to be remembered from the ongoing work. They tell where you are right now and point to the future. Reports tell about the mission of each group and, together with other reports, provide the basis for the church's history.

History and Background

Early writing with a reed stylus or pointed stick on a wax or clay tablet was used to keep reports of the activities of the temple. Many early tablets recorded economic, legal and administrative material, but stories, hymns and proverbs in the Bible today were part of those early records.

Moses returned from Mount Sinai with a significant report. The scroll hidden in the temple until Josiah discovered it (2 Kings 22-23) led to sorely needed reform. Paul's letters are reports of the early church.

Common Practices

Most reports in churches are those prepared for the annual meeting. They report on the work of

committees and organizations during the past year and point toward their future work. The writing of the report may be followed by a presentation of it at the annual meeting. Although people sometimes just read their written reports, the presentation should be different since members should have read the written report before the annual meeting.

The governing board usually determines who is responsible for writing the annual report for the whole church. The reports of committees, ongoing groups (women's organization, youth group, Bible study) and specific task groups (peace and world hunger task force, pastoral search committee) give flavor to the report of the overall mission of the church during the year. In most churches the chairperson of each committee is responsible for preparing the annual report for that committee.

Throughout the year, other committee members are asked to report on some aspect of their work to the whole committee, the governing board or the congregation. These reports may be less formal than the annual report.

Responsibilities

In preparing reports, you are responsible for:

- Answering the following questions in the report:
 - **Why?** Why is the group reporting? It may be that the

deacons "are charged in the constitution with the responsibility of the oversight of worship, caring for human needs in the parish, assisting the pastor...." It may be that it is a task force set up during the year with a particular responsibility: "The task force on world hunger was established by the deacons and asked to discover specific ways our church could participate in the work to alleviate hunger and to bring proposals to the annual meeting."

- **Who?** Who gave the group authority and who participated in the group? It might say "In response to a specific need which was described by our pastor, the church council established a committee composed of...." Tell personal stories if they help illustrate the work of the group. Identify people by their first and last names.
- **What?** What was your responsibility or task? Were there any limits of the assignment? Were you to deal with world hunger or hunger in the community? Were you to work with other United Church of Christ churches or an ecumenical group? What effect did the budget have on the work? What problems were faced? What criteria were established to deal with the problems

or to undertake a mission effort? What did you find out? What did you do? If you evaluated a particular problem, tell what alternatives were considered, the advantages and disadvantages of each and what you are recommending.

- **So what?** You might say, "As a result of our deliberations, we voted that" or, "We took the following action and our task is completed ..." or, "Based on our study, we recommend that the church take the following action because...."
- Making it interesting. Use illustrations from the primary class for the Christian education committee report. Put in quotes from community leaders about the work of the church. In a special anniversary year, interview people who can compare the church 25 years ago, or at its beginning, and quote them throughout the year.
- Determining whether there is a specific format to be used.
- Getting it in on schedule. Your tardiness could affect the schedule for reproducing a larger report.
- Being accurate and clear. The annual report is a matter of record for years. Saying that a "subcommittee of the board of deacons met at the home of Ron and Christine and talked about the problems of the church" won't mean much in a few years. What was the purpose of the subcommittee? Who are Ron and

Christine? What problems? It might help to have someone who knows nothing about your group read the report to see whether everything is clear.

- Using inclusive language and non-stereotyped images.
- Reporting on the whole year if it is an annual report, not just the most recent decisions. Telling what happened chronologically may be the best method.
- Keeping it short. Tell all you need to in as few words as possible.

Skills and Attributes Needed

- Ability to write clearly and concisely or to get help doing so.
- Familiarity with the work included in the report.
- Ability to summarize and draw implications and conclusions.

Ways to Increase Skills, Knowledge and Effectiveness

- Look at reports from previous years from the collection of annual reports and see what is expected and what makes a report clear and interesting.
- Get help in writing a report if you don't have confidence in your writing. Check it out with a teacher, writer or newspaper editor. If you ask for help from someone

outside the church, your annual report may become a tool for evangelism.

- Test your report out on yourself. Write it early enough to be able to let it rest for a day or more and reread it aloud. Rewrite if necessary.
- For ideas about ways to use your written report as a basis for a report at an annual meeting, see the article on Annual Meeting Planning in this resource

Issues Facing the Church

- Will people who read reports be able to discover how well the church is meeting its mission and fulfilling the gospel from the collection of annual reports?

Questions

- How can you help the reader of the report be a responsible reader? Will illustrations, quotations, headlines or short paragraphs help?
- How will you translate the written report into an oral one for the annual meeting, if that is part of your responsibility? Would audio-visuals help?